

Department of Land Conservation and Development. *Oregon's Verdant Willamette Valley: Growing Crops While Growing Cities* . Salem, OR: Department of Land Conservation and Development, May 1999. (Reviewed by Kyle Walker.)

The Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development prepared this report in response to a claim by the American Farmland Trust that the Willamette Valley's farmland ranks among the most endangered farmland by development in the United States. In the 1990s, Oregon's population grew at a faster rate than the national average, and the Willamette Valley accounts for 74 percent of this growth. These figures caused the American Farmland Trust to worry about negative effects that urban growth would have on farmland in the Willamette Valley, which generally is very productive. The DLCD, however, responds to the farmers' concerns by citing the Statewide Land Use Planning Program, which protects over two million acres of Willamette Valley land. Furthermore, the DLCD gives three examples of how farmland can be lost, and then addresses how Oregon protects farmland from those causes.

One way that farmland can be lost in Oregon is through expansion of urban growth boundaries to accommodate growing populations. Although the Willamette Valley's population has grown since the establishment of urban growth boundaries in the 1970s and 1980s, the authors of the report cite that this has not negatively affected farmland. Despite population growth in the Willamette Valley between 1987 and 1998, cities added little to their urban growth boundaries. When Oregon cities established their urban growth boundaries, they allowed for a twenty-year supply of land in order to not eclipse these boundaries.

A second way that farmland could be lost is through rezoning of farmland by counties to rural development zones. However, since 1987, counties have rezoned only 1,429 acres of farmland out of the total two million acres zoned for exclusive farm use. Finally, counties are able to allow "non-farm uses" in farm zones that convert farmland to various public uses, including campgrounds, golf courses, and schools. Until 1993, this posed a serious threat to farmland, but in response, the legislature made development for reasons other than farming more difficult in the Willamette Valley. Since this legislation passed, there has been a sharp decline in approvals of both new farm and non-farm dwellings. In conclusion, the authors of the report assert that little farmland has been lost in the Willamette Valley since the early 1980s, and if state and local land use laws are obeyed, farmland loss should not be a problem in the future.

Critique

Overall, this report provides a clear response to the concerns put forth by farming interests. The authors examine the possible ways that farmland could be lost, and then effectively describe how Oregon has combated these threats to farmland. Graphs, charts, and a detailed map help illustrate the DLCD's arguments. Furthermore, this report can cater to a wide range of readers because of its relative simplicity and clarity. Both experts on agriculture and land use issues and concerned citizens with little knowledge of land use policy would be able to read this report and understand its arguments.

However, fundamental math errors in this report put its credibility into question. The DLCD includes several statistics in their report to back up their arguments, and express many of the data as percentages. However, when calculating these percentages, the DLCD performed simple math errors that should not appear in published documents. One such example is its comparison of Valley population growth to urban growth boundary expansion. The authors write that in 1987, urban growth boundaries for the 91 cities in the Willamette Valley totaled 435,524 acres. Between 1987 and 1998, Valley UGBs expanded by 2,671 acres. The report then states: "Population grew by 0.82 percent between 1987 and 1998, but UGBs expanded by only 0.006 percent." In fact, UGBs expanded by 0.6 percent according to the DLCD statistics given above; the authors of the report did not multiply by 100 to obtain a percentage. This error appears multiple times in the report, and because the authors do not provide raw data for Willamette Valley population expansion, other than that it grew by 420,000, I could not determine the 0.82 percent figure's accuracy from the report. However, according to SEDCOR, a Valley development agency, Valley population grew in the 1990s by 17.8 percent, a figure that is not consistent with the DLCD's statistic. Unfortunately, the report's errors mar a document that is otherwise informative and useful.

<http://www.sedcor.org/Population04.pdf>

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